

A New Cavalry Research Facility

U.S. Cavalry Memorial Research Library Opens at Fort Riley

by Brigadier General Philip L. Bolté, USA, Ret.

On April 30, a long-time aim of the United States Cavalry Association became reality with a symbolic ribbon-cutting at the entrance of the United States Cavalry Memorial Research Library, which is appropriately housed in a historic converted stable building at Fort Riley, Kansas. After playing a significant role in the settling of the West, Fort Riley was the home of the Army's Cavalry School until the school finally closed following World War II. What more appropriate location could there be for the Army's U.S. Cavalry Museum and the U.S. Cavalry Association's new Library?

The U.S. Horse Cavalry Association was formed in 1976 by a group of former cavalymen who were concerned that the demise of the horse cavalry and the modern emphasis on other means of cavalry transportation might lead to the loss of much of the cavalry tradition, heritage, and history. Many of these Association founders had themselves made the transition from horse to vehicle during World War II and they recognized the importance of maintaining the spirit and élan of the pre-war horse cavalry. To meet their major aims, they considered establishing a museum and library, but subsequently opted to support the Army's U.S. Cavalry Museum, which had been established at Fort Riley in 1957. The desire for a library remained strong, though, and the Association began early in its existence to collect books, papers, maps, and photographs from its horse cavalry veteran members.

In 1981, an agreement was signed by Association representatives, the Commanding General of Fort Riley, and the Chief of Military History which formalized Association sponsorship of the Cavalry Museum. By 1984, the Association had provided not only significant financial support to the Cavalry Museum, but had also been able to collect and provide to the museum a number of cavalry artifacts. Originally established at Fort Bliss, Texas, the Association moved its headquarters to Fort Riley in 1991, allowing closer coordination between the Association

and the Cavalry Museum. A modest building was provided for Association use as a headquarters. Storage space was also provided for the Association's growing collection of artifacts, some of which were usable by the Cavalry Museum, but many more of historic value.

Although the Association continued to build its library collection, the formal establishment of a library remained an elusive goal, as a quality facility would require both a suitable building and significant funding. The Association's collection shared tight quarters in the headquarters building, with the full-time executive director, providing research services on an *ad hoc* basis. Over the years, the Association has become well-known for its ability to answer a broad range of cavalry-related questions.

Through the 1980s and into the 1990s, the Association was maturing, growing to well over 2,000 members across the country and in a few other countries. In order to attract a wider range of members, "Horse" was dropped out of the Association title in 1993. That year the Association also established the United States Cavalry Memorial Foundation as the administrator of an endowment fund, seen as required to support regular operations, as well as to grow funds for a library. Both the Association and the Foundation are tax-exempt organizations under the Internal Revenue Code.

By 1997, the endowment fund had become adequate to support most normal Association operations and finally establishing a library appeared to be feasible. In response to an Association request for a suitable facility to house a library, as well as the Association headquarters and its artifact collection, the Commanding General of Fort Riley offered the Association use of a former stable building. Used as a stable until the closing of the Cavalry School, the building had been converted to other uses in the 1950s. Its last use had been as a prisoner work shop before simply being used for storage.

In late 1997, the Association launched an all-out effort to establish the U.S. Cav-

alry Memorial Research Library, recognizing that the opportunity to overcome the challenge of finding a suitable facility might not come again. The 11,300 square foot building would provide adequate space to house the Library in one end and the headquarters and artifact collection in the other.

A plan was developed, to include the expenditure of about \$200,000, and submitted to various foundations and trusts with requests for support. By mid-1998, though, with the exception of a significant grant from the Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation, most contributions had come from members of the Association, many small ones and several larger ones. At its fall meeting last year, the Association board of directors, knowing that the approximately \$100,000 on hand would not be sufficient to complete the project, nevertheless decided to proceed with the necessary building renovation. It was hoped that being able to show major progress would make the effort more attractive to potential donor foundations and trusts.

The initial effort required the removal of a few existing walls, major reconstruction of latrines into suitable rest rooms, changes to heating/air conditioning ducts and in lighting, and wall repair and painting. New walls were then constructed and painted. Shelf facilities for books, donated by Kansas State University, were installed. By January 1999, the building, albeit austere, was ready for occupancy and moving days were at hand. By the end of the month, the new building was operational. A formal opening of the Library was scheduled for April 30.

The solicitation of funds continues, with major work still to be done to complete the project. Major building efforts to be accomplished include installing a suitable covering on the concrete floor and the purchase and installation of external air conditioning condensers. These major tasks and other less costly ones require about \$56,500. Equipping the Library with proper audio-video equipment and furnishings will require an additional



The limestone stable building above, constructed in 1905, was once the stable for staff officers of the Cavalry School. The U.S. Cavalry Memorial Research Library now occupies one end of the building and the U.S. Cavalry Association headquarters and artifact collection the other.

After extensive remodeling of the building interior, seen at right, the U.S. Cavalry Memorial Research Library moved into its new quarters in early 1999.



\$25,000. Finally, the headquarters and artifact end of the building requires about \$15,000 to furnish. Fortunately, most of this work can be done as funds become available.

One of the requirements still unmet, though, is to build the endowment fund of the U.S. Cavalry Memorial Foundation from its current amount to approximately \$1,000,000, which requires an increase of about \$400,000. This addition will allow hiring a full-time librarian and provide funds for library operations. The Association is working hard to raise the money.

Meanwhile, with its formal opening, the U.S. Cavalry Memorial Research Library, established in its new Fort Riley facility, is available for researchers, members of memorial cavalry units, reenactors, and the general public to capitalize on its unique and growing collec-

tion of cavalry knowledge. Until a full-time librarian is available, the ability to respond to queries will continue to be limited, but the Library is open during normal duty hours.

One active volunteer program that contributes uniquely to the Library collection is the oral history program. Veteran cavalymen are interviewed by committee members or conduct self-interviews on tape. Through a mutually beneficial arrangement with Texas A&M, the tapes are transcribed and the tapes and transcriptions retained by each institution. They provide fascinating first-hand accounts of the horse cavalry of the 1920s and 1930s.

For additional information on the U.S. Cavalry Association, write the association at P.O. Box 2325, Ft. Riley, KS 66442-0325; phone them at (913) 784-

5795; visit their web site <www.wtvi.com/cavalry/>; or e-mail them at <cavalry@flinthills.com>.

As a new repository of U.S. Cavalry history, as well as a reference source for horsemanship, the U.S. Cavalry Memorial Research Library promises that a unique part of Army history and lore will not be lost in the modern world. The collection already numbers more than 5,000 items, including documents, books, maps, tapes, and photographs.

BG Philip L. Bolté was commissioned in Cavalry in 1950, one month before the branch was changed to Armor. During his 30 years of active duty, he served in the 1st, 3rd, 7th, and 14th Cavalry Regiments.